

Unified Purpose: Intentional Community

March 11, 2018

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Lectio Divina

(Here is a passage to help your group as you worship. You can go through it together or in groups in meditation and/or in prayer)

Read Hebrews 10:24-25 using the prayer practice of Lectio Divina. Read the passage aloud 3 times. After each reading, spend a few minutes reflecting. After the first reading, open yourself to the presence of God. On the second reading, listen for a certain word or phrase that stands out to you. On the third reading, listen to what God's invitation might be for you.

Icebreaker

Share a story of when a friend has helped you when you were in need.

Text for Discussion: Mark 2:1-12

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

In our current series, we are walking through the vision and mission of our church. We've discussed how we are to make disciples and apprentices of Jesus – people who worship publicly and privately, engage in a life of mission, and are involved in intentional community (this week's topic). The Christian life is a group experience, and the story of the paralytic and his friends offers insight into what intentional community means and what it looks like in action. We'll examine this story from the perspective of the stretcher bearers and from that of their friend, the "man on the mat."

The Stretcher Bearers were people of action, deeply concerned about their friend. But most of all, these were people who were intentionally present in each other's lives. Presence is the first and essential step on the road to both intentional community and mutual discipleship. It requires sacrifice and a willingness to arrange (and rearrange) our schedules for one another. So for many of us, the biggest spiritual change we can undertake is to make room in our lives for community.

The stretcher bearers were also people of great faith. They deeply believed that Jesus could help and went to great lengths to bring their friend before Him. Do we have that kind of faith? Do we really believe that if we bring our friend to Jesus, that Jesus can help them? Jesus specifically points out that it is the faith of the friends that healed the man. The story therefore teaches us about the faith we need to bring each other to Jesus – because sometimes we can't do this for ourselves.

Third, the stretcher bearers were people who saw healing. When their friend got up and walked, they were shocked and amazed, and their perspective was entirely changed. Bringing one another to Jesus in intentional community helps us to experience the amazing things God is doing in the lives of those around us, teaching us to expect God to be at work in His people.

The "Man on the Mat" was a person of trust. He was in need and had friends willing to do whatever it took to help. But first, he had to *let* them help, trusting and engaging in this process of healing. How many of us are willing to trust people with our version of this? How many of us are willing to receive help? This story speaks to our need for a mutual covenant commitment as the body of Christ. As a church, we are committed to making sure everyone gets the care they need, but each of us has to make the choice to engage. At PCC, we agree to be bound together – to bring each other to Jesus – through membership, and we practice intentional community through community groups, life-on-life groups, seminars, classes and interest groups.

Being the man on the mat has a calling of its own, which is the reason Jesus so often asked, "*Do you want to be healed?*" This choice to engage means that when we are on the mat, we will also be people who see healing. This doesn't mean God heals people every time we engage. But if we are looking for God to show up through each other in intentional community, we undoubtedly will be surprised and amazed by what does happen.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

How does intentional community grow us in discipleship?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

Opening questions...

- Read the two “vignettes” below...
- Ask: in general, which do you struggle with more—being a person who has a hard time giving help, or a hard time receiving it?
- Ask a couple of people in the group to share the last time they had to give or receive help.
 - Were there some specific things that were difficult about the experience?

Digging Deeper

- Looking at Mark 12:1-2, what ways did the man on the mat have to trust?
- In what ways did his friends take action?
- The passage says, “When Jesus saw their faith...” the faith of the friends, not the guy on the mat. Have you ever seen your faith help someone in need?
- Why do you think Jesus connected the man on the mat’s illness to sin? Do you think that is always the case?

Application

- When you see someone with a need do you *actually* think in terms of “bringing them to Jesus”? Why or why not?
 - What suggestions do you have as to how all of us could begin evidencing that kind of faith?
- How can the idea of “bringing someone to Jesus” help in solving relationship crises that can arise around a time of life crisis?
- If you were the man on the mat do you think you would have had the faith to “take up your mat”? Why or why not?

Experiment of the Week

At the end of the service yesterday, David asked for everyone to be praying about one person that they need to connect with or be present with. Take the week to connect or be present with that person and share with the group about your experience next week.

Praying for One Another

(Here are some ideas from the study to help focus your time in prayer as a group. Use by themselves or along with other prayer requests.)

- Thank God that He has created us to live in community.
- Pray that we would be friends like the ones written about in Mark 2.
- Ask God to reveal a person to you who you can come alongside and encourage .
- Ask God to reveal to you an area in your life where you need help from others.

The Story of Tony
(who has trouble giving help...)

Tony is a man who loves his comfort. He likes his job because it is a simple 9 to 5 weekday schedule. This allows him to ride his bike in the evening and have fun on weekends. People who know Tony know he likes his toys. He has a small boat, large television, a motorcycle, and on and on it goes.

These things are important to Tony because he never had them as a child. His parents were poor and needed Tony to help out around the house to help make ends meet. He rarely had time to play. Because they were poor, Tony never had nice clothes. His parents bought low end or used toys. He always felt he was being left out of the fun his friends were having.

Tony goes to church with his family. He finds himself thinking of all the things he could be doing if he were not at church. In fact, he often daydreams about these things during the church gathering. He is someone who goes for an hour and leaves. He doesn't mind talking to others, but is usually arranging some kind of outing with his church friends.

Tony becomes very anxious when others get sick or a friend has having personal problems. He feels that if he gets too close, he will get "drawn in" and lose his ability to live his own life. Although he cannot verbalize it, he is afraid that he will become engulfed by other people's problems. What he does say to his children is "Be careful for people like that. If you start doing things for them you will never stop."

Tony's children learned long ago that if they need help they should go to their mother. They know that Tony is "too busy" to help them out.

The Story of Frank
(who has trouble receiving help...)

Frank is a bank teller at a local bank. He likes his job because he sees himself as the go to guy when people are having problems.

His parents expected him to help them out throughout his growing up years. Frank is the oldest of four kids. His father was and continues to be an alcoholic. His mother always seemed overwhelmed and often couldn't get out of bed. As a result, Frank found himself in the position of caring for his brothers and sister. He had to hide food when he was little and money when he was older so that he and his brothers and sister had enough to eat. After having the electricity turned off several times and being evicted once, he learned to remind his parents to pay bills. He later would balance the checkbook when his parents were not looking and would look at the bank statements when they came.

In his family, he is beginning to have problems. After working all day, he comes home and stays busy until he goes to bed. He rarely does things for himself. He feels that he is always doing things for his wife, but she doesn't seem to care. He hasn't told anyone but he feels his wife and children do not give back to him like he gives to them. In stead of saying anything, he becomes irritable and sulky.

At church, Frank likes to be in the helper role. He likes finding seats for people who show up late, he hands out programs, helps visitors and others find their way. He has a tendency to give money to others when his family is in need. He cleans up after others. He is finding himself irritable at church as well. At first people were quick to say, "Thank you," but now people have begun to take him for granted. He feels he deserves to be given public praise, but also feels it would be prideful if he were to tell someone.

Although Frank is quick to offer help to others, he is even quicker to avoid receiving help from others. He feels that receiving help from others leaves him in debt to others. If someone gives him some kind of help, he is quick to repay the deed many times over. He is afraid that if he does not out-give others, they will expect him to do something for them later or hold a grudge toward him.

Frank has refused to get counseling for years. However, his anger has become so explosive that his manager at work has requested that he go. In counseling, he resists being listened to. He wants his therapist to share his own problems with the hope that it will "balance the playing field." In addition to paying his therapy bill he likes to give his therapists little gifts to ensure that he is not obligated to the therapist. Also, before he leaves, he straightens the pillows in the room and straightens the items on the table in the room.